



STATE OF MAINE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SPEAKER'S OFFICE
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1300

MARK WESTWOOD EVES
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Office

AUG 07 2015

**of the
Governor**

August 7, 2015

Governor Paul R. LePage
1 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0001

Gov. LePage,

This letter is in response to your August 5 communication regarding the drug crisis in our state.

We are in agreement on the severity of the drug crisis in Maine and the concern we have for the impact it has on families and communities across our state. For nearly two decades, I've served on the frontlines helping families and children at risk, many struggling with poverty and drug addiction. In this role, I've seen the positive impact access to health care and substance abuse treatment can have for these struggling families and individuals.

I would urge you to view this drug crisis as a health care crisis not just a matter for law enforcement. I commend your action convening a summit of experts and advocates from the treatment and law enforcement community to address this crisis. Given my professional background and my role as Speaker, I would be very interested in participating in the summit. I would also encourage you to reach out to other House members who have expertise in this area.

The obituaries and news stories we've seen in recent weeks show the drug crisis in our state is tied to poverty, to mental illness, and to lack of access to health care. When people, especially those living on the margins, lose access to health care they have nowhere to turn. Over the last four years under your administration, we've seen thousands of families lose health care, including access to drug treatment, and we've seen substance abuse treatment centers close for lack of funding.

Your proposed biennial budget proposed a cut in MaineCare funding for treatment without a plan for hundreds of people with addiction who would lose coverage. You also proposed to dramatically cut MaineCare rates for substance abuse providers. Cuts in MaineCare coverage and low reimbursement rates have already lead to the closure of one of the largest treatment facilities in the state and we know that others are struggling to stay open. Your administration claims that there are funds for substance abuse treatment that are not being used, but neither the

legislature nor the substance abuse providers are aware of the funding you reference. We are interested in learning more about that.

Additionally, I take strong issue with your false attack on the Legislature for failing to fund law enforcement efforts to combat this drug epidemic. Democrats and Republicans came together this year to pass a biennial budget that will fund up to six new drug enforcement agents and two new drug prosecutors to handle major drug crimes. The budget also funds two new judges and two new clerks for the Court System to handle the increased caseload, as well as provides funding to reestablish a new drug court in Penobscot County.

We also passed an important bill banning the use of acetyl fentanyl, an extremely dangerous and potent opioid and we expanded access to a life-saving overdose antidote. We took all of these steps over your objections. When we tried to require private insurance companies treat abuse deterrent opioid medication the same as non-abuse deterrent opioid medication, you vetoed the bill.

I also was troubled to recently learn that your administration has chosen to cancel two contracts with the Maine Alliance for Addiction Recovery and the Maine Alliance to Prevent Substance Abuse. These programs have been successful in helping Maine people access needed prevention, treatment and recovery services.

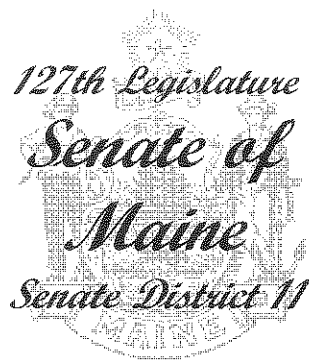
The drug crisis in our state requires a comprehensive approach. We cannot only focus on one side of the coin or the other. Substance abuse treatment alone or law enforcement alone won't get us over the finish line. We must work collaboratively to do both. It is my hope that the legislature and the executive branch can work together to address critical issue.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark W. Eves', followed by a horizontal line.

Mark W. Eves
Speaker of the House

cc: Michael D. Thibodeau, President of the Senate



Senator Michael D. Thibodeau
President of the Senate
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Office

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**of the
Governor**

August 7, 2015

Paul R. LePage, Governor
State of Maine
1 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Governor LePage:

Thank you for your letter outlining your concerns about Maine's drug crisis and the explosion in overdoses from heroin and other opiates. We cannot simply sit back and watch this tragedy unfold. Lives are being lost and families are suffering. This is not an issue we can leave up to individual towns and cities to tackle. Tragedy is striking in municipalities all over the state, regardless of population, location, or affluence. Maine needs a comprehensive, statewide effort that includes law enforcement efforts and effective treatment. It is not acceptable to ignore this growing epidemic and it must be addressed.

Convening a summit to further study this issue is an excellent step forward, and I appreciate your work to bring people together for this purpose. Assembling experts and advocates from all sectors of society is key to understanding the scope of the problem and the most effective solutions for combatting it. It would certainly be beneficial for the Maine Senate to be involved in the summit and to hear directly from the experts about what policy initiatives may be best suited for battling the drug epidemic. As details of the summit come together I would encourage you to invite participation from Senate members, especially those who serve on committees that are dealing with the effects of these drugs.

I have always been and remain committed to advocating for additional state resources to be directed toward fighting the drug scourge. In standing with you and Commissioner Morris to discuss this very issue earlier this year, I spoke candidly about my support for your initial funding proposal to support law enforcement in their anti-drug efforts. This Legislature did secure funding for two new drug court judges and four new drug agents in the recent biennial budget, but certainly more needs to be done.

I am happy to sponsor and/or encourage the passage in the Senate of any viable recommendations or solutions that come forward from the summit or other sources. Please let me know of your thoughts and ideas as to how I can help address this issue.

In order to make a difference we must seek constructive solutions – lives are literally depending on us doing so. I would encourage you and your administration to engage with legislators to tackle this epidemic. Working together, we can achieve great things.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Thibodeau". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Thibodeau
Senate President

cc: Mark Eves, Speaker of the House